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THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2015

Battle in the wings

Niagara's north and south tiers may be facing off over the future of airport operations.

Page 4

NHS back in black

Niagara Health System was operating with a healthy surplus at the end of its fiscal year — the first time in five years.

Page 9

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Food festival makes soggy return



ALLAN BENNER
/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Casey Legault dumps
rain water that pooled
on the tent above the
Churchill Natural
Meats food booth
Saturday at the Flavours
food, craft beer and wine
festival.
See the full story on
Page 3.

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Port High salutes Class of 2015



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Port Colborne High School principal Ann Kennerly congratulates valedictorian Russell James at the school's June 25 graduation ceremony. It was the ninety-third commencement at the school.

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■ **EVENTS:** Rain falls on event's return

'Still having fun' at Flavours food festival

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Just when it seemed the dismal weather was starting to clear up, it rained harder.

But the show went on despite the deluge.

And the rain couldn't wash the smile away from Port Colborne's events co-ordinator, Allaina Kane, while she trudged across the soggy lawn of H.H. Knoll Lakeview Park during the Flavours Food Crawl Beer and Wine festival.

Her smile garnered a few comments from people attending the event.

"I laughed, because people kept saying, 'You're smiling,'" Kane said. "I said, 'Absolutely, we're still here. We're still having fun.'"

The festival returned Saturday and Sunday after taking a year off in 2014 to make some changes to the way it was run.

Kane said the revamped festival is now more focused on vendors working from food trucks, rather than from tables.

The trucks, she added, "are self-sustaining which takes away some of our infrastructure requirements, which lowers the cost."

Meanwhile, she said the food truck operators have been around long enough to build a reputation and garner their own followers that will help add participants to the festival.

The city also brought in five micro-breweries, five wineries and a cidery "to attract another demographic."

"We wanted to make it a true event — a destination for people to come," she said. "The food, the wine and the craft breweries were our goals — and with vendors that we have there's no duplication, so there truly is something for everyone and something that everyone can try."

Gatorbait, Sister Act and Joneey performed Saturday, and The Reverend Blues, Groovy Food and Big John Little T Bone entertained audiences Sunday.

There were also originally to be 13 food vendors, although three opted out primarily due to the weather.

The weather "is a challenge, absolutely," Kane said.

But there were a lot of hungry people who were up to that challenge.

"We've actually had quite a few people coming in with their umbrellas, and then

making the rounds to get their food and their beer. Then they go into the tents, sit down and listen to the music," she said.

"Spirits are up, and that's always a positive"

Alicia Bedesky from Churchill Natural Meats was smiling, too, despite the rain.

"This is probably the worst weather we could have for this kind of thing, but what can you do about it?" she asked.

She planned to stay for the remainder of the festival, although there weren't many people

around to buy the wild boar sausage and rosemary mint lamb burgers she was serving.

"If nothing else we'll just trade out sausage for beer, because there's nobody else here," she said with a laugh.

While the weather couldn't be helped, John Molloy from Chocolate Expressions was impressed with the city's efforts organizing the festival.

"The City of Port Colborne has done a great job so far," he said. "Quite a bit of marketing has gone into this as well."

While it was Molloy's first time at the event, he said he will be back again next year.

"Initially the people did come support us before the rain really started to come down. They were quite happy to be here."

Kane said the festival will definitely be back next summer.

"We missed it last year, and we missed the opportunity to host the community and to have visitors come and hang out and see what Port Colborne really has to offer," she said.



Casey Legault batters down the hatch on the tent above the booth for Churchill Natural Meats.

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LOCAL NEWS

■ **ANALYSIS:** Responsibilities for operations up in the air

North-south airports battle in the wings

GREG JUMINGER
Postmedia Network

A north-south battle could be in the wings as north Niagara municipalities push to upload their costs and responsibilities for operation of Niagara District Airport onto Niagara Region.

That plan — it would ease the burden on St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls property taxpayers — could stick costs for the Niagara-on-the-Lake airport with all 12 lower-tier municipalities — including Welland, Pelham, Port Colborne and Wainfleet, whose residents already fund Niagara Central Dorothy Rungeling Airport through their local taxes.

Councils representing the municipalities parties with the Niagara-on-the-Lake airport all support Niagara District Airport commission's desire to move its facility from one for general aviation to one that supports international flights, under regional control of its current annual operating budget of \$300,000.

But when the matter moves to regional council chambers for consideration, expect turbulence.

Says Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn of the north's province, "I put it on Facebook: 'I'm not supportive of this unless they look at both airports at the same time.'"

Right now, the north is giving no consideration to the Pelham-based airport, including what impacts it may incur if a plan to move the Niagara-on-the-Lake airport toward an international hub, with needed expenditures of an estimated \$8 million, moves ahead.

Decisions made about changes to the way the Niagara-on-the-Lake airport functions will affect the other, Augustyn says.

"They really are part of our transportation niche, so the two have to be looked at in tandem."

What's being talked about in the north is independent of any consideration for the municipal airport in the south.

"This, unfortunately, is coming across as the (north) municipalities attempting to upload the funding responsibility to the region," Augustyn says.

"I don't know if that's what they're trying to do, but that's how it's coming across."

Mike Britton, a St. Catharines city councillor who sits on the Niagara District Airport commission, says that's not the case.

What he hopes is that there is political will now to act on a proposal put forward as far back as 1993.

"It's a rare opportunity where we can have a better service for less," he says, adding the commercial plans if successful will mean none of Niagara's southern municipalities would find themselves presuming paying taxes for operation of second airport.

Britton, a Ward 3 St. Catharines councillor, says a 2013 feasibility study for the airport shows the proposal that soon could land in front of regional councilors "could be a 'no flyable' — and that's where he says 'differentiation' is made between the Niagara-on-the-Lake facility and the one in Pelham."

"It's pretty much a regional airport in everything but name now," he says of Niagara District.

Investment in the north will bring economic rewards far greater than would investment in the southern airport, he says.

He also suggests an international hub would have no impact on operations now offered at the Taylor Rd. centre.

Still, for Niagara Region not to consider an upload of both airports could be seen as flying in the face of its very own Grow South economic development policy.

The Pelham airport and the one in Niagara's north both serve numerous commercial enterprises throughout the area.

"Together, the two airports have a huge economic impact on the region" — and that doesn't include the potential for far greater impact with proper investment, says Richard Rybiak, chair of the Niagara Central Dorothy Rungeling Airport commission.

"They are part of the fabric of our landscape, and should not be viewed as just being under the purview of the privileged" who are served by Rybiak, a Ward 1 Pelham councillor.

"Both airports together represent a complimentary and self-supporting system," he says.

It is a desire that Niagara Region also become a funding partner in the southern airport, he says.

"That's something we'd like to change," he says.

"The amount of money required is far outweighed by the economic impact — and not the potential impact."

Regional Chair Alan Caslin was unavailable to comment on this story Friday, but his office did issue a statement attributed to him.

"We will examine all proposals for regional airports that are received by the regional council," Caslin says.

"Once received, all proposals will be studied and assessed with considerations given to regional council's strategic plan and the transportation master plan which is targeted for completion in 2017."

No motions have been put forward to Niagara Region from either airport commission.

Rybiak says if the north's plans take flight, the southern airport will be able to better

offer services to private flyers than could be at a less publicly accessible international facility that would require infrastructure and security and screening for outgoing and incoming flights by the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and Canada Border Services Agency.

The 416-acre Pelham airport, which has a conservatively estimated economic impact to the region of between \$5 million and \$8 million, has two paved runways (lengths of 3,500 and 2,070 metres) also has water landing access on the Welland River and accommodates glider training and parachuting.

"We are not in competition" with Niagara District Airport, Rybiak says — stressing consideration of Niagara Region operation of both airports is not about "fairness," but instead the economy.

"Both airports, he notes, contribute to economic growth.

Including revenues, the south airport has an annual operating budget of less than \$200,000. Its four partnered municipalities contribute about \$1 per resident to its operation.

Like the Niagara-on-the-Lake airport, and many others across the country, development tends to be grounded by lack of money.

"There's not a lot of it going into reserves, so the infrastructure will not survive on its own," Rybiak says.

An appeal for donations on the southern airport's website identifies priority spending areas as runway and apron repairs, a new septic system and historic buildings.

The southern airport's tenants include St. Catharines Flying Club, Niagara Skydive Centre and Tarey Aircraft mechanic services, and, says Rybiak, Acceptor Radar Technologies is building a demonstration hangar. It is also home to 87 Eagle Squadron Air Cadets and 609 Air Cadets.

The north says it can't afford to properly invest its airport; it has potential for building the local economy.

Says the south: Ditto.

"They're both valid regional facilities you want to look at," says Welland Mayor Frank Campion.

"You can't forget us down here."

So, let the showdown — as a segment of Niagara's economic community calls for the creation of just one Niagara government — begin.

Niagara's money-losing airports have always been food for political debate.

And be sure — parochialism will again rear its ugly head.

In 2008, Niagara District Airport commission wanted Niagara Region to commit to a \$500,000-a-year operating pledge (\$1.16 per Niagara resident). It was shelved pending a request for a review of air transportation in Niagara.

One that would take into account Niagara Central Airport in the south.

"Niagara District isn't the end-all and be-all of air infrastructure in Niagara region," then-Port Colborne mayor Vance Badway had said in a move that stalled the request that was eventually dropped in the north's hopes of instead landing funding from higher government.

More on that in a bit. Right now, things may not look so good for the south airport.

A Jacobs Consultancy report released in August 2009 recommended Niagara Region take the reins of Niagara District Airport — but also specifically said that the upper-tier municipality not control or regularly fund Niagara Central Airport.

However, that report also recommended St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls continue paying a share of operational costs for their airport — something which has not been raised with Niagara District Airport

commission's current proposal.

At the same time the 2009 Jacobs report came out, regional council was then into months of discussion on whether to fork over \$3.8 million towards planned \$11.4-million renovations to the Niagara-on-the-Lake facility. The federal and provincial governments promised \$7.6 million towards critical security, runway and building improvements — but that money was contingent on the cash-strapped airport finding a municipal funding partner with deeper pockets.

In September 2009, regional council reluctantly agreed to spend \$3.8 million on the airport marking its 80th anniversary to ensure the \$8 million in Building Canada Fund stimulus cash from Ottawa and Queen's Park would not be lost.

Augustyn says it was under an understanding Pelham's airport would be helped in return at some future date.

The money for Niagara District went to securing fencing, repaving all runways and taxiways and adding new taxiways to make traffic movement faster and safer. The 1996-era terminal was also replaced.

That airport's commission then had hoped the changes — read: if we build it, they will come — would bump up airport revenues toward self-sustainability.

Similar to its hopes under its latest proposal to regional authorities.

This latest move just to update the airport comes up a little more than two years after the three municipal partners in Niagara District Airport signed an operation agreement not to expire until 2026 — and following the loss of the City of Thorold as a partner.

Any change to that agreement involves a yearlong process.

In the meantime, a push for one Niagara government will continue.



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SHIPWRECKS

Former tug Tipperary sank off Florida in 2014

SKIP GILLHAM
For Postmedia Network

The tug *Tipperary* was upbound in the Welland Canal, on its delivery trip to the Great Lakes, on May 25, 1981.

It worked out of the Detroit area for the Gaelic Tug Boat Co. until departing Detroit for New York as *Tilly* on Aug. 23, 1980.

This vessel was built for the Defense Plant Corp. in 1943 as *D.P.C. 86* and was stationed at New York looking out for mines and submarines that might infiltrate the harbour during this time of war.

It was sold to the Lewis Oil Co. to push its fuel barges on the Hudson River in 1947 and served as *Lewis No. 8*. This continued until the ship came inland for work as *Tipperary* in 1981.

Then, as *Tilly*, the vessel had several owners and the last occupant, apparently a homeless man, lived on board the ship at a marina in Key West, Fla. The unseaworthy vessel was evicted in a dispute with the marina, towed out to sea with the resident still on board on Feb. 21, 2014, and anchored off Key West.

A few days later the tug sank in deep water as a total loss although the resident was rescued. Legal action was expected.

Tackling poverty neighbourhood by neighbourhood in Niagara

BRIAN BATY
For Postmedia Network

Niagara Region has put in place an annual funding program directed at resolving issues related to poverty.

The program is known as Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI). Efforts began in 2006 when an Ontario Early Years data analysis co-ordinator facilitated community focus group sessions across the 12 lower-tier municipalities. At these sessions participants looked at maps to determine neighbourhood boundaries.

Through consensus 74 neighbourhoods were identified and named.

A neighbourhood mapping tool was created to measure a number of determinants of poverty and the mapping tool was then used to focus on the development of programs to address poverty.

This NPI tool is available at niagararegion.ca. You can click the NPI mapping tool and then click on any community. Selecting a demographic will highlight most populated for that group in lighter to darker brown colours. Selecting an indicator will highlight in red areas where the issue selected requires attention as it is worse than the average.

The demographics include: total population, sole support parents, immigration, children aged 0 to 14, population over 65, tenant occupied dwellings and average gross rent. The indicators include low income measure, unemployed, percentage of income on rent above 30% and percentage of no high school education in ages 25 to 64.

A team of reviewers is assembled from

diverse members of the community from across Niagara including several regional councillors. A detailed ranking scheme is provided for each reviewer and each proposal is reviewed by two or more reviewers. They present their review separately and then the group provides input. Each project is accepted, modified or rejected and the originator is given feedback on why the project was or was not accepted. In every year the number of submissions far exceeds the funds available.

The 2015 projects were distributed throughout Niagara and in the following categories: 10 Educational programs for children; three community gardens; one access to food; four life skills for adults; three community development; three assistance with shelter; three job skills; two direct services and one for a research/conference/seminar.

Annually, \$1.5 million dollars is budgeted for this initiative. To date, 41 projects have been approved with a little more than \$1.3 million dollars budgeted. These projects will serve 7,453 people.

All projects are reviewed throughout the duration of the project and a final report is submitted to regional council through the public health and social services committee. As a Pelham regional councillor, I have served for several years on this NPI review team and have had discussions with Pelham Cares about similar projects that might be considered for Pelham in future grant submissions.

Brian Baty is a regional councillor for Pelham and a member of the public health and social services committee. E-mail brian.baty@niagararegion.ca.

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■ **FIRE:** Port Colborne emergency services called to Rose Ave.

Barbecuing in garage leads to death of cat, \$200K damage

Postmedia Network

An evening barbecue ended with tragic consequences for a Port Colborne couple after the appliance sparked a fire in the garage that spread to the home and killed the household cat.

Fire Chief Tom Cartwright put the damage total was about \$200,000.

Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services were dispatched to 44 Rose Ave. at 6:18 p.m. last Wednesday.

Cartwright said a barbecue was being used inside the garage then was left unattended.

Fire spread from the garage up interior walls.

"Certainly there is an extraordinary

large loss" for this barbecue fire, he said.

"They lost a family cat."

The home was insured, but most of its "high-end" furnis-


ings and contents, including family photos, were ruined by smoke damage.

Parts of a 2010 Nissan were also melted by the fire.

Cartwright said a son has made alternate living arrangements in north Niagara until the home is inhabitable again.



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■ HEALTH CARE

NHS back in black for first time in 5 years

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

There were a lot of smiling faces at the annual general meeting of Niagara Health System last week.

Ending the year with the organization's first surplus in five years will do that.

The NHS recorded a surplus of \$8.53 million, which will be used to continue paying down long- and short-term debt, said Angela Zangari, executive vice-president of finance and operation of the NHS, after the meeting.

The NHS has an annual budget of about \$500 million.

Zangari said the NHS ran a deficit of \$450,000 last year, and the organization

was planning to run a surplus on a regular basis.

"I truly get a sense in the Niagara Health System that everyone is aware and wants to make sure we are putting all our resources where it really matters the most, which is patient care and quality," said NHS board chair Dr. Barry Wright, who ran the meeting in the auditorium at St. Catharines hospital.

Over the course of the year covered by the report, the NHS had 30,089 admissions and maintained 722 beds. There were 2,846 births at its facilities, 5,760 cataract surgeries and 20,576 MRI scans. The report said about 76% of NHS expenses are related to the provision of direct patient care for inpatient nursing

units, clinics, diagnostic imaging and therapies. About 15% of

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3⁴⁹

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